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Former CIA clerk denies spy charge

By Pam McClintock
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A former CIA clerk pleaded guilty yesterday to revealing the identities of two Ghanaian dissidents working for the CIA to a Ghanaian national who became her lover after she was assigned to the West African nation. But she said she had not spied against her country.

Sharon Marie Scranage and her former lover, Michael Agbotui Soussoudis, pleaded not guilty to charges of espionage during a hearing in U.S. District Court in Alexandria. If convicted, each faces a maximum penalty of four life terms in prison.

During a second court appearance, Miss Scranage, 29, of King George, Va., pleaded guilty to two counts of violating laws that protect the identities of intelligence agents. The maximum penalty for each count is 10 years in prison, a \$50,000 fine or both. She is free on a \$250,000 bond.

"She is not guilty of espionage. She is not guilty of conspiracy," said Brian Gettings, attorney for Miss Scranage.

"By no stretch of the imagination is she a spy," Mr. Gettings said.

Miss Scranage and Mr. Soussoudis, who were arrested in June, were indicted last week on charges that the two threatened the security of the United States by obtaining classified information from December 1983 to May 1985 while Miss Scranage was assigned to the CIA station in Accra, Ghana.

Mr. Soussoudis, 39, who remains in custody, is a relative of Ghana leader Jerry Rawlings and works for that country's intelligence service, prosecutors said.

Mr. Gettings, a former U.S. attorney, said he had thought he was close to working out a plea bargain for Miss Scranage with the U.S. attorney's office in Alexandria, but that negotiations broke down. His client cooperated with law enforcement officials and helped get

Mr. Soussoudis to the United States before the two were arrested, he said.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Justin Williams, who is handling the case, declined to comment on the negotiations and said that the government intends to "go fully forward" and prosecute Miss Scranage on the espionage charges.

Sources in the Justice Department, however, confirmed that high-level officials in the department intervened in the plea agreement negotiations, stating that they wanted Miss Scranage to be prosecuted. Her trial is scheduled for Oct. 7, while Mr. Soussoudis will go to trial Oct. 12.

Miss Scranage's family, whom she has been staying with in King George, watched yesterday's proceedings. Miss Scranage's brother, Perry Scranage, said the family will stand behind her.

"All we are trying to do is get a fair and just trial," Mr. Scranage said. "We believe in this country. We love this country," he said. "She went out to do the best job she could do and ... somehow she got into trouble. But we still love her."

The information that Miss Scranage turned over to Mr. Soussoudis was said to include the names of CIA agents working in Ghana, the names of Ghana dissidents and their activities, including a planned coup.

Miss Scranage, who had top security clearance, worked as an operations support assistant at the CIA station, typing intelligence reports and cables and handling station accounting.

Shortly after Miss Scranage arrived in the West African nation in May 1983, she met Mr. Soussoudis and they became lovers, said Mr. Williams.

Miss Scranage continued her affair with Mr. Soussoudis on a "clandestine basis" after she was told in January 1984 by the CIA station chief in Accra to sever all ties with him.